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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6448
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RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0220
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY 0141
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 0111
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 0221
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 1212
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000327

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: INSPECTOR GENERAL OF PRISONS DISCUSSES THE
CHALLENGES OF HOLDING HIGH-PROFILE DETAINEES

REF: A. 07 DHAKA 1584

[1](#)B. DHAKA 250

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Geeta Pasi; reasons 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In a recent meeting, the Inspector General of Prisons discussed with POLOFF the health conditions of the two jailed former prime ministers. He also said he was trying to arrange for Sigma Huda, a prominent human rights activist, to be transferred back to the hospital for further treatment. He expressed frustration at the limitations under which he was working -- particularly the lack of secure hospital beds with adequate guard coverage for prisoners, and the lack of guards to provide protection for the numerous high-profile prisoners in his custody. END SUMMARY.

HASINA, ZIA DISPLAY DIFFERENT ATTITUDES BEHIND BARS
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[1](#)2. (C) Recently, POLOFF met the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Brigadier General Md Zakir Hassan, to discuss ongoing issues related to the detention of prisoners under the state of emergency. Hassan was appointed to the position of IGP in 2006 and has undertaken major reforms of the prison system over the past year. (Reftel A) In his capacity, he is responsible for the 67 prisons throughout Bangladesh, as well as the special sub-jails in Dhaka created for the two arrested former prime ministers and the secure medical facilities at the Post-Graduate (PG) Hospital, one of the largest public hospitals in Dhaka.

[1](#)3. (C) The IGP told POLOFF he had visited former prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia several times, most recently two days earlier. During Hasina's corruption trial, which is currently suspended for legal reasons, the judge excused Hasina from the proceedings after she suffered an attack of vertigo brought on by high blood pressure. The IGP said the treatment for this type of medical condition is bed rest and medication. He thought Hasina was more psychologically distraught than physically ill, though he admitted her nerves were likely a contributing factor to her blood pressure.

[1](#)4. (C) The IGP said he has tried to accommodate Hasina's wishes regarding her medical care, though it is up to the

government, not the prison system, to decide on whether to send her abroad for treatment. When the IGP has brought in prominent Dhaka doctors of his choosing to examine Hasina -- to provide what he called an "objective" assessment of her condition -- she has refused to see them. In addition, Hasina has been allowed to see doctors of her choosing for various ailments. To the frustration of the IGP, these doctors have tended to speak to the press after leaving Hasina, often making political statements and allegedly exaggerating her condition. (NOTE: On March 11, Hasina agreed to go to a private hospital to be examined by a panel of physicians to determine whether recurrent ear ailments -- the result of an August 2004 assassination attempt -- required treatment abroad. The doctors, who were chosen by Hasina, reportedly recommended unanimously she be permitted to travel to the US for treatment, saying she risked permanent hearing damage if she did not receive proper care soon. The prison authorities said they would pass the recommendation to the government for further action. END NOTE.)

15. (C) Khaleda Zia, on the other hand, is far less demanding, though seemingly in more pain, according to the IGP. She suffers from acute arthritis, particularly in the knees, and recently her elbow has swelled up, preventing her from bending her arm. She has also suffered toothaches that have left her in severe pain. Like Hasina, Zia is attended by doctors of her choosing, but she has not demanded outside treatment.

16. (C) The IGP assured POLOFF attorneys for both high-profile defendants are permitted access to their clients, though they have to apply in advance through the Home Ministry's Special Branch of Police.

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CONTINUED FRUSTRATION OVER SIGMA HUDA

17. (C) The IGP expressed frustration over the Sigma Huda situation. Sigma, a UN Rapporteur on Anti-Trafficking and a prominent human rights activist, has been charged with several counts of extortion. She is appealing her conviction on one set of charges and currently is undergoing trial in another case. The IGP said there was no doubt Sigma was unwell -- she suffers from heart and kidney ailments as well as diabetes -- but the entire prison system, with over 87,000 inmates, is serviced by only sixteen hospital beds at PG Hospital. Sigma was moved back to the VIP section of the Dhaka Central Jail because there were other prisoners who required more immediate attention than she did. (Reftel B)

18. (C) According to the IGP, the prison system does not have enough guards to move ill prisoners into private hospitals, and Sigma could not be treated at home unless the court grants her bail -- a decision beyond the IGP's purview. The IGP said that only the day before, a regular prisoner being treated in an unsecured room at PG Hospital for an emergency managed to escape from his two guards. The prisoner had been convicted of theft and murder, and his escape caused the IGP great embarrassment.

19. (C) These challenges notwithstanding, the IGP told POLOFF he had freed up a room at the PG Hospital, and Sigma could be moved back to the hospital soon. In response to a request from Sigma's family members that prison authorities let them bring her meals as she is diabetic, the IGP said this was against prison regulations (on security grounds) but he would reconsider the matter. (NOTE: Sigma was moved back into the hospital two days after the IGP met with POLOFF. Sigma's sister also told POLOFF the family was working out an arrangement with prison authorities to provide special food for her. END NOTE)

COMMENT
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¶10. (C) The lack of resources and manpower for the prisons are challenges even under normal circumstances, but the influx of high-profile prisoners has added to the strain on the system. The IGP is also hamstrung by Hasina's apparent determination to make a public relations campaign of what may or may not be a serious illness. He said repeatedly the last thing he wants is for anything to happen to anyone in his custody. He is clearly concerned that if anything does happen to the high-profile prisoners in particular, he will be blamed. Regardless of his motivation, the IGP appears to be doing his best to improve prison conditions and find solutions for the difficult situations facing key prisoners. Pasi